

What's happening in Washington State

What's happening in Washington State is occurring in the other states as well. What I am referring to is the onslaught of policy changes underway within our Public Land Management agencies as well as federal and state legislation which is bombarding our state and our citizens. These changes if initiated will alter the recreational quality of life and impact the way we use and enjoy our public lands.

Take for example the Bureau of Land Management who are presently engaged in reshaping the way they will manage public lands they control over the next 20 years through a less than transparent and open process known as the (RMP) or Resource Management Plan. Public access to public lands is at risk of being lost.

Then there is the USFS who are revising and changing plans and policies on the way they manage our National Forest here in the state and throughout the nation under a less than stellar process which is known as the (TMP) Travel Management Plan. Once again the public's right to access & use is in danger.

Not to be outdone and overlooked is the USFWS who are constantly trying to restrict land use practices by exploiting the intent of the Endangered Species Act. They continue initiating listings for flora and fauna which have no legitimate and substantiated reason for being considered for the register. Case in point is the Bladder pod flowering plant which is purported to be endangered but is commonly found in other parts in America. This proposed list is currently being challenged by affected property owners and a new round of hearings is scheduled for next month.

State land management agencies that quite often align and collaborate with the federal land management agencies are not immune from fiscal irresponsibility and are suffering substantially. Of particular interest to the citizens of Washington is the Washington State Park System who are quietly celebrating 100 years of existence this year, yet not since the Great Depression has it been so broke and in financial despair. All the while the state is facing a massive deficit resulting in dramatic budget cuts seriously impacting our public lands.

Another important land access issue the public is watching centers around Rattlesnake Mountain located on the Hanford Reach National Monument in Benton County of Eastern Washington. This 3,600 foot ridge on the Hanford nuclear reservation is the highest point in the Mid-Columbia offering amazing views of Central Washington, the Columbia River and the HR National Monument.

This piece of real estate has been controlled by the federal government since 1943 when it was taken over by Eminent Domain actions to serve as a buffer

for the Manhattan project. It was unused from 1960 to 2000 when it was designated as part of the Hanford Reach Nat. monument by then President Bill Clinton on June 9th.

This year, Rep-Doc Hastings (Wa-04) and chairman of the congressional House committee on Natural Resources who authored and introduced public access legislation stated "This is about making sure that the land the American people own is accessible to them." As of this writing this piece of legislation has unanimously passed in the US House of Representatives but has yet to gather a sponsor in the Senate. Presently, access to the summit of Rattlesnake Mtn. is prohibited by the USFWS who manages the National Monument. However they have begun offering limited wildflower tours on a first come first served basis.

These are but a few of the issues facing the citizens of Washington, yet I am reasonable sure every state in the nation is dealing with integrity and credibility issues with our federal and state land management agencies. As with the citizens of Washington State it is incumbent for all American citizens to hold their elected officials accountable and responsible for matters affecting our public lands and rights.

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